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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: WILL HAITI HOLD CREDIBLE ELECTIONS?

REF: A. PORT-AU-PRINCE 217

- [1](#)B. PORT-AU-PRINCE 250
- [1](#)C. PORT-AU-PRINCE 235
- [1](#)D. PORT-AU-PRINCE 222
- [1](#)E. PORT-AU-PRINCE 129
- [1](#)F. PORT-AU-PRINCE 128

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Douglas M. Griffiths
for reason 1.(4) b.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Haitian and international election authorities face uncertainties as they prepare to conduct the first round of Haiti's elections on February 7. The most serious of these are the competence and performance of poll workers, particularly at rural and isolated voting centers, and the ability of the security forces to respond to disruptive elements without provoking further disorder or causing panic. Nevertheless, and taking into account the probability of some disorder on election day, several factors are at work that make it more likely that the Haitian people will accept the credibility of these elections and move on to the second round scheduled for March 19. Most importantly, the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) and MINUSTAH have ensured a transparent voting and tabulation process. Additionally, Haiti's runoff system is likely to produce a diffuse range of parliamentary candidates across the political spectrum who have a stake in accepting the first round results. In the presidential race, the emergence of Rene Preval as the front runner has distilled the campaign into a referendum on his return to power. If, as polls suggest, Preval moves on to the second round against a candidate from one of the nine "Entente" parties opposed to him, the majority of Haitians will likely accept that they have a candidate in the race who represents their view on the overriding issue -- a second Preval term -- and thus add to those with a stake in the first round result. An outright victory for Preval in the first round could dramatically alter that dynamic and mobilize his opponents to contest the result. However, if domestic and international observers are quickly able to attest that voting on February 7 was free and fair, the roughly four-day period between the end of polling and the announcement of official results will give Haitian and international leaders the opportunity to solidify a consensus that first round results were credible and must be accepted. As challenging as the successful conclusion of the first round of voting will be, the completion of the second round is likely to be equally challenging, requiring our continued focus and leadership of Haiti's international partners. End Summary.

12. (SBU) As reported in ref C, the CEP and MINUSTAH will continue to work up to the last minute to resolve interconnected issues relating to the transparency of the process, voting center organization, and the maintenance of a positive security climate. As reported in ref A, MINUSTAH and the CEP have made arrangements that should ensure transparency and credibility for the mechanics of the voting process, ballot security, and results tabulation unprecedented for a Haitian election. Though political parties and other critics have focused attention on the supposedly insufficient numbers of voting centers throughout the country, ultimately the limited number of voting centers and the concentration of polling stations into "mega-centers" in the major population centers should work to elections organizers' advantage. MINUSTAH and the CEP will concentrate their logistical and security forces at voting centers that serve the overwhelming majority of voters and thus establish an atmosphere of order and calm at the flashpoints, particularly the poorer neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, from which Haitians will draw conclusions about order and security as election day goes on. There will likely be much more potential for disorder at isolated rural voting centers, and we expect at least some incidents to take place at these sites. MINUSTAH's and the CEP's challenge will be to dispatch resources they have assigned to broader area security to these trouble spots and contain these incidents before they lead to widespread disorder or seriously affect voter participation. The candidates, and to a lesser extent the political parties, seemingly have a vested stake in the success of the process. However, the polarized nature of Haitian society is the chief underlying vulnerability.

Lots of Winners

13. (SBU) As reported in Ref D, we expect very few senatorial seats to be settled in the first round, meaning that as many as 180 candidates from a large number of the 45 registered parties will emerge to contest the second round. Parties may contest individual results in parliamentary races, especially in the senate races where small numbers of votes could separate the "winning" 5th and 6th place candidates from the 7th place finisher. Taken nationally, however, we expect the senate races to produce a large contingent of politically diverse candidates who will actively defend the first round result. We are less certain of the outcomes of the deputy races, where there will be more first round winners. Still it appears that winners will represent an array of political parties, and thus reinforce the motivation of the major parties to accept the first round results.

One Big Winner?

14. (C) The presidential race has boiled down to one overriding issue, Rene Preval's return to power. We have very little credible polling on which to base a judgment, but virtually no polling, credible or otherwise, indicates Preval will win the requisite 50% plus 1 vote to win a first round victory outright. A challenger to Preval will almost unquestionably come from among the nine parties of the "Entente," who pledged to support whichever candidate among them that goes through to the second round. Independent Charles Henri Baker and former president Leslie Manigat appear the strongest of these nine candidates. Whether or not a second round is necessary, there are those among the nine who appear willing to contest the result, most notably Evans Paul and Paul Denis. Charles Henri Baker, who many expect to finish second behind Preval, has stated to polcouns directly that he expects to come in first, and any other result will be evidence of foul play or fraud. Whatever the results of the first round, the CEP does not expect to announce official results before Friday, February 10, or possibly February 11. Assuming an acceptable level of order and voter participation, the period between the close of

polling and the CEP's announcements of results should give domestic and international elections observers the opportunity to clearly endorse the election process, and give Haitian and international leaders the time to build a consensus in order to minimize the impact of challengers or spoilers.

¶15. (C) Campaign activity and voter interest seems to be peaking (ref B). As the result of a mammoth effort, the OAS will have distributed nearly 95% of voter id cards to the 3.5-plus million registered voters. While interest in obtaining ID cards does not completely reflect interest in voting, the efforts Haitians displayed to collect their cards on time and inform themselves regarding voting arrangements indicates most Haitians want to vote. Barring serious incidents that mar the entire electoral process, we expect voter turnout of at least 50 percent, and possible significantly better.

CEP on Board

¶16. (C) Members of the Provisional Electoral Council seem to have pulled together as a group in recent days, though infighting continues. As a whole, the group seems to have concluded that their individual reputations rest on the collective performance of the CEP. Pierre Richard Duchemin, who played a critical role during the registration process but later often interfered with CEP Director Jacques Bernard, publicly called this week for the Haitian people to participate in the electoral proces and make the best of the situation, admitting a recognition that the electoral process has its flaws but it is time to move forward. Patrick Fequiere, who has lain the groundwork for contesting the election since his appointment to the CEP, continues to be a disruptive member of the committee. However, his persistent criticisms have gained less and less traction as his reputation as a spoiler has grown.

¶17. (C) Comment. The heavy lifting will not end with the successful conclusion of the first round. If the presidential race produces Preval and an opposition candidate, as we hope and expect, the polarization of the Haitian electorate will create at least the potential for serious tension through the second round. MINUSTAH and the CEP will have the opportunity to fine tune their planning and an easier logistical task for the second round, but will need an infusion of funds and a continued united front among Haiti's international partners to carry the electoral process to its conclusion.

CARNEY